

The Girl from Tim's Place

BY CHARLES CLARK MUNN
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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Chip McGuire, a 16-year-old girl living at Tim's place in the Maine woods, is sold by her father to Pete Bolduc, a half-breed. She runs away.

CHAPTER II.—Chip McGuire, the camp of Martin Frisbie, occupied by Martin, his wife, nephew, Raymond, and guides. She tells her story and is cared for by Mrs. Frisbie.

CHAPTER III.—Explains journey of Frisbie's party into woods to visit father of Mrs. Frisbie, an old hermit, who has resided in the wilderness for many years. When camp is broken Chip and Ray occupy same canoe.

CHAPTER IV.—The party reach camp of Mrs. Frisbie's father and are welcomed by him and Cy Walker, an old friend and former business partner of Frisbie. They settle down for summer's stay.

CHAPTER V.—Chip and Ray are in love, but no one realized this but Cy Walker. Strange canoe marks found on lake shore in front of their cabin.

CHAPTER VI.—Strange smoke is seen across the lake. Martin and Levi leave for settlement to get officers to arrest McGuire, who is known as outlaw and escaped murderer.

CHAPTER VII.—Chip's one woods friend, Tomah, an Indian, visits camp. Ray believes he sees a bear on the ridge.

CHAPTER VIII.—Chip is stolen by Pete Bolduc and escapes with her in a canoe.

CHAPTER IX.—Chip is rescued by Martin and Levi as they are returned from the settlement. Bolduc escapes.

CHAPTER X.—Old Cy proposes to Ray that he remain in the woods with himself and Amzi and trap during the winter, and he concludes to do so. Others of the party return to Greenville, taking Chip with them.

CHAPTER XI.—Chip starts to school in Greenville and finds life unpleasant at Aunt Comfort's, made so especially by Hannah.

CHAPTER XII.—Old Cy and Ray discover strange tracks in the wilderness.

CHAPTER XIII.—They penetrate further into the wilderness and discover the hiding place of the man who had been snatching about their cabin.

CHAPTER XIV.—They investigate the cave home of McGuire during his absence. Pete Bolduc, seeking revenge for losing the girl, is also on the trail of McGuire.

CHAPTER XV.—Bolduc finds McGuire and the two fight to the death, finding a watery grave together.

CHAPTER XVI.—Spring has come and Ray leaves the woods with Levi, leaving Old Cy and the hermit, Amzi, at the camp.

CHAPTER XVII.—Ray returns to Greenville and finds Chip waiting for him.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Chip tells Ray of her trouble in Greenville. Ray fails to visit her the first evening of his arrival, and Ray explains.

CHAPTER XIX.—Ray wants Chip to return to the woods with them, but she, feeling that the old hermitship with Ray has been broken, refuses. When they part, however, it is as lovers.

CHAPTER XX.—Chip runs away from Aunt Comfort's and finds another home with Judson Walker. She gives her name as Vera Raymond.

CHAPTER XXI.—Amzi Abby, Aunt Mandy Walker's sister, visits them, and takes Chip home with her to Christmas Cove.

CHAPTER XXII.—Chip goes to school at Christmas Cove. She tells Aunt Abby the story of her life. Aunt Abby tells her of her family, and she discovers that Cy Walker is a long-lost brother of Judson Walker, but fear of betraying her hiding place prevents her telling of Cy.

CHAPTER XXIII.—Old Cy especially found life dull after Ray had gone. The hermit also appeared to miss him and became more morose than ever. He never had been what might be termed social, speaking only when spoken to, and then only in the fewest possible words. Now Old Cy became almost a walking sphinx, and found that time passed slowly. His heartstrings had somehow become entwined with Ray's hopes and plans. He had bent every energy and thought to secure for Ray a valuable stock of furs and gum, and as with his nature, felt a keen satisfaction in helping that youth to a few hundred dollars.

Now Ray had departed, furs, gum and all. He had promised to return with Martin and Angie later on, but of that Old Cy felt somewhat dubious, and so the old man mourned.

There was no real reason for it, for all Nature was now smiling. The lake was blue and rippled by the June breezes; trout leaped out of it night and morning; flowers were blooming, equisetis frisking, birds singing and nest-building; and what Old Cy most enjoyed, the vernal season was at hand.

Another matter also disturbed him—the whereabouts of McGuire and the half-breed, Pete Bolduc.

Levi had brought the information that neither had been seen nor heard of since the previous autumn; but that was not conclusive, and somehow Old Cy felt that a certain mystery had attached itself to them, and once he suspects a mystery, it pursues us like a phantom. He did not fear either of these renegades, however. He had never harmed them. But he felt that any day might bring a call from one or the other, or that some tragic outcome would be disclosed.

Another problem also annoyed him—who this thief of their game could be, and whether his supposed cave lair was a permanent hiding spot.

Two reasons had kept Old Cy from another visit to that sequestered lake during the fall trapping season: first, its evident danger, and then lack of time. But now, with nothing to do except wait for the incoming ones, an impulse to visit again this mysterious spot came to him.

He had, at the former excursion, felt almost certain that this unknown trapper was either McGuire or the half-breed. Some assertions made by Levi seemed to corroborate that theory, and impelled by it, Old Cy started alone, one morning, to visit this lake again. It took him until midday to carry his canoe, camp outfit, rifle, and all across from the stream to stream, and twilight had come ere he reached the la-

keon where he and Ray had left the main stream and camped. Up here Old Cy now turned his canoe, and repairing the bark shack they had built, which had been crushed by winter's snow, he camped there again.

Next morning, bright and early, he launched his canoe and once more followed the winding stream through the dark gorge and out into the rippled lake again.

Here he halted and looked about. No signs of aught human could be seen. The long, narrow lakelet sparkled beneath the morning sun.

The bald mountain frowned upon it, the jagged ledges just across faced him like serried ramparts, an eagle slowly circled overhead, and, best indication of primal solitude, an antlered deer stood looking at him from out an opening above the ledges.

"Guess I'm alone here!" exclaimed Old Cy, glancing around; "but if this ain't a picture worth rememberin', I never saw one. Wish I could take it home."



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opening. A faint light illumined its interior—a weird slant of sunlight, yet enough to show a roomy cavern.

The mystery was solved. This surely was the hiding spot of the strange trapper!

"Can't see why I missed it afore," Old Cy muttered, kneeling that he might better look within, and sniffing at the peculiar odor. "Wonder if the cuss is dead in thar, or what smells so!"

Then he arose and grasped the slab of slate. One slight pull and it fell aside.

"A nat'ral door, by hokey!" exclaimed Old Cy, and once more he knelt and looked in.

The bravest man will hesitate a moment before entering such a cavern, prefaced, so to speak, by two abandoned canoes, a rusty rifle, human head covering, each and all bespeaking something tragic, and Old Cy was no exception. That he had come upon some gruesome mystery was apparent. Canoes were not left to rot in the wilderness or rifles dropped without cause.

And then, that hat! Surely here, or hereabouts, had been enacted a drama of murderous nature, and inside this cavern might repose its blood-stained sequel.

But the bleeding beams of light encouraged Old Cy, and he entered. A fireplace deftly fashioned of slate occupied one side of this cave; in front a low table of the same flat stone, resting upon small ones; and upon the table were rusty tin dishes, a few mouldy hardtack, a knife, fork, and scraps of meat, exhaling the odor of decay. A smell of smoke from the charred wood in the fireplace mingled with it all. In one corner was a bed of brown fir twigs, also mouldy, a blanket, and tanned deer skins.

The cave was of oval, irregular shape, barely high enough for Old Cy to stand upright. Across its roof, on either side of the rude chimney, a narrow crack admitted light, and as he looked about, he saw in the dim light another doorlike opening into still another cave. Into this he peered, but could see nothing.

"A queer livin' spot," he muttered at last, "a regular human panther den. An' 'twas out of this I seen the smoke come. An' here's his gun," he added, as more accustomed to the dim light, he saw one in a corner. "Two guns, two canoes, an' nobody to hum," he continued. "I'm safe, anyhow. But I've got to peek into that other cave, sartin sure," and he withdrew to the open air.

A visit to a couple of birches soon provided means of light, and he again entered the cave. One moment more, and then a flaring torch of bark was thrust into the inner cave, a mere crevasse not four feet wide, and stooping, as he now had to, Old Cy entered and knelt while he looked about.

He saw nothing here of interest except the serried rows of jutting slate, across two of which lay a slab of the same—no vestige of aught human, and Old Cy was about to retreat when his flare burning close to his finger tips unnoticed, caused him to drop it on the instant, and drawing another from his pocket he lit it while the flame lasted in the first one.

It is said that great discoveries are almost invariably made by some trifling accident—a gold mine found by stumbling over a stone, a valley profuse of diamonds disclosed by digging for water.

In this case it was true, for as Old Cy bent to light his second torch ere he withdrew from the inner cave, a flash of reflected light came from beneath this slab—only for one second, but enough to attract his attention.

He stooped again and lifted the slab. Six large tin cans had been hidden by it. He grasped one and could scarce lift it. Again his fingers closed over it. He crawled backward to the better-lighted cave and drew the cover off the can with eager motion, and poured a heap of shining, glittering coin out upon that food-littered table.

Into that dark hole he dived again, as a starved dog leaps for food, seized the cans, two at a time, almost tumbled back, and emptied them. Four had been filled with gold coin and two stuffed with paper money.

Folded with these bills of all denominations from one to fifty dollars was a legal paper yellowed by age, with a red seal still glowing like a spot of blood.

It was an Innholder's license, authorizing one Thomas McGuire to furnish food, shelter, and entertainment for man and beast.

With eyes almost tear-dimmed and heart throbbing at having found poor Chip's splendid heritage, Old Cy now gazed at it.

The sharp stones upon which he knelt nearly pierced his flesh, but he felt them not.

The glint of sunlight from the crack above caressed his scant gray hairs and white fringing beard, forming almost a halo, yet he knew it not.

He only knew that here, before him, on this rude stone table, lay thousands of dollars, all belonging to the child he loved.

"Thank God, little gal," he said at last, "I've found what belongs to ye. 'n' ye hain't got to want for nothin' no more. I wish I could kiss ye now."

Little did he realize that at this very moment of thankfulness for her sake, poor Chip was lost to all who knew her, and, half starved and almost hopeless, knew not where to find shelter.

CHAPTER XXIV.—When Old Cy emerged from the cave, his face glorified and heart throbbing with the blessings now his to give Chip, he looked about with almost fear. The two abandoned canoes and the rusty rifle had seemed an assurance of tragic import, and yet no proof of this outlaw's death. That this cave had been his lair, could not be doubted; and so momentous was this discovery, and so anxious was Old Cy to rescue this fortune, that he trembled with a sudden dread.

But no sign of human presence met his sweeping look.

The lake still rippled and smiled in the sunlight. Two deer, a buck and doe, were feeding on the shore.

shore that across, white at their feet that rusty rifle still uttered its fatal message.

Once more Old Cy glanced all about, and then entered the cave again. Here, in the dim light and with trembling hands, he filled the cans once more, and almost staggered, so faint was he from excitement, he hurried to the canoe, and packing them in its bow, covered the precious cargo with his blanket.

Then he ran like a deer back to the cave, closed it with the slab, grasped his rifle, and not even looking at the rusty one, bounded down the path to his canoe again, launched it, and pushed off.

Never before had it seemed so frail a craft. And now, as he swung its prow around toward the outlet, a curious object met his eyes.

Far up the lake, and where no ripple concealed it, lay what looked like a floating log, clasped by a human arm.

What intuition led him thither, Old Cy never could explain, for escape from the lake was now his sole thought. And yet, with one sweep of his paddle he turned his canoe and sped across the lake.

And now, as he neared this object, it slowly outlined itself, and he saw a gruesome sight—two bloated corpses grasping one another as if in a death grapple. One had hair of bronze red, the other a hideously scarred face with lips drawn and teeth exposed.

Hate, Horror and Death personified. Only for a moment did Old Cy glance at this ghastly sight, and then he turned again and sped back across the lake.

The bright sun still smiled calm and serene, the morning breeze still kissed the blue water, the two deer still watched him with curious eyes; but he saw them not—only the winsome face and appealing eyes of Chip as he last beheld them.

And now in the prow of his canoe lay her fortune, her heritage, which was, after all, but scant return for all the shame and stigma so far meted out to her.

It was almost sunset ere Old Cy, his nerves still quivering and wearied as never before, crossed the little lake and breathed a sigh of heart-felt gratitude as he drew his canoe out on the sandy shore near the ice house. No one was in sight, nor likely to be. A thin column of smoke rising from the cabin showed that the hermit was still on earth, and now for the first time, Old Cy sat down and considered his plans for the near future.

First and foremost, not a soul, not even his old trusted companion here, not even Martin, or Angie, and certainly not Ray, must learn what had now come into his possession. Neither must his journey to this far-off lake or aught he had learned there be disclosed.

But how was he to escape from the woods and these people, soon to arrive for their summer sojourn? And what if Chip herself should come? Two conditions forced themselves upon him now: first, he must so conceal the fortune that none of these friends could suspect its presence; next, he must by some pretext leave here as soon as Martin and his party arrived, and cease not his watchful care until Chip's heritage was safe in some bank in her name.

And now, with so much of his future moves decided upon, he hurried to the cabin, greeted Amzi, urged him to hasten supper, and, securing a shovel, returned to his canoe.

In five minutes the cans of gold were buried deep in the sand, and upon Old Cy's person the bills found concealment. How much it all amounted to, he had not even guessed, nor scarce thought. To secure it and bear it safely away from this now almost accursed lake had been his sole thought and must be until locks and bolts could guard it better. That night Old Cy hardly slept a moment.

Two days after, just as the sun was nearing the mountain top, Martin, Angie, Levi and Ray entered the lake.

How grateful both Old Cy and Amzi were for their arrival, how eagerly they grasped hands with them at the landing, and how like two boys Martin and Ray behaved needs no description.

All that had happened in Greenville was soon told. Chip's conduct and progress were related by Angie. Ray's plans to remain here another winter were disclosed by him; and then, when the cheerful party had gathered about the evening fire, Martin touched upon another matter.

"I met Hersey as we were coming in," he said, "and he says that neither McGuire nor the half-breed has been seen or heard of since early last fall. Hersey came in early this spring with one of his deputies; they visited a half dozen lumber camps, called twice at Tim's Place, and even went over to Pete's cabin on the Fox Hole, but nowhere could they learn anything of these two men. More than that, no canoe was found at Pete's hut, and there was no sign of occupation at all this past winter. Nothing could be learned from Tim, either, although this is all the most mysterious disappearance, and the last that we can learn of Pete was his arrival and departure from Tim's Place after we rescued Chip."

"I think both on 'em has concluded this section was gittin' too warm for 'em," remarked Levi, "an' they've lit out."

"It's good riddance if they have," answered Old Cy, "an' I'm sartin none on us'll ever set eyes on 'em again."

And Old Cy spoke the truth, for none of this party ever did. In fact, no human being, except himself and Martin, ever learned the secret that this mountain-hid lake could tell.

But another matter now began to interest Old Cy—how Ray and Chip stood in their mutual feelings. That all was not as he wished, Old Cy soon guessed from Ray's face and actions, and he was not long in verifying it.

"Wal, how'd ye find the gal?" he said to Ray when the chance came.

"Was she glad to see ye?"

"Why, yes," answered Ray, looking away, "she appeared to be. I wasn't in Greenville but two weeks, you know."

"Saw her 'most every evenin' durin' that time, I s'pose?"

"No, not every one," returned Ray, vaguely, "her school hadn't closed when I got home, and she studied nights, you see."

Old Cy watched Ray's face for a moment.

"I ain't pryin' into yer love matters," he said at last, "but as I'm on your side, I'd sorter like to know how it's progressin'. Wa'n't thar nothin' said 'tween ye—no sort o' promise, 'fore ye come 'way?"

"No, nothin' of that sort," answered Ray, looking confused, "though we parted good friends, and she sent her love to you. I'm afraid Chip don't quite like Greenville."

Old Cy made no answer, though a smothered "hum, ha" escaped him at the disclosure of what he feared.

"I wish ye'd sorter clinched matters 'fore ye left," he said, after a pause; "that is, if ye're callatin' to be here 'nother winter. It's 'most too long to keep a gal guessin' 'sides, 'tain't right?"

Ray, however, made no defense, in fact, seemed guilty and confused, so Old Cy said no more.

A few days later he made a proposal that astonished Martin.

"I've been here now 'bout two years," he said, "an' I'm gittin' sorter uneasy. I caltate ye kin spare me a couple o' weeks."

No intimation of his real errand escaped him, and so adroitly had he laid his plans and timed his movements, that when his canoe was packed and he bade them good-by, no one suspected how valuable a cargo it carried.

Old Cy was more than "sorter uneasy" for the only spot where he dared close his eyes in sleep during that three days' journey out of the wilderness was in his canoe, with his head pillowed on that precious gold.

CHAPTER XXV.—When Old Cy joined the little party at the lake again he seemed to have aged years. His sunny smile was gone. He looked weary, worn and disconsolate.

"Chip's run away from Greenville," he said simply, "an' nobody can find hide nor hair on her. They've follered the roads for miles in every direction. Nobody can be found that's seen anybody like her—'n' they've even dragged the mill-pond. She left a note chargin' it to that darn fool, Hannah, and things she said, which I guess was true. I'd like to duck her in the hoos-pond!"

Such news was like a bombshell in the camp, or if not, what soon followed was, for after a few days Old Cy made another announcement which upset the entire party.

"I think I'd best go back to Greenville," he said, "an' begin a search for that gal. I ain't got nobody in the world that needs me so much, or I them. I'm a sorter outcast myself, ez you folks know. That little gal hez crept into my heart so, I can't take no more comfort here. Amzi don't need me so much as I need her. I've made up my mind I'll start trampin' till I find her. I've a notion, too, she'll head for the wilderness agin, 'n' I'm 'most sartin she'll fetch up whar her mother was buried. I watched that gal middlin' clus all last summer. She's true blue 'n' good grit. She

CHAPTER XXVI.—For a few days Uncle Jud acted as if he had forgotten something and knew not where to look for it. He lingered about the house when he would naturally be at work. He peered into one room and then another, in an abstracted way, and finally Aunt Mandy caught him in the keeping-room, with one curtain pulled aside, and seated in one of the haircloth chairs and looking around.

"Mandy," he said, as she entered, "do you know, I think them pictures we've had hangin' here high on to 40 year is homely 'nuff to stop a horse, 'n' they make me feel like I'd been to a funeral. Thar's that 'Death Bed o' Dan Webster,' an' 'Death o' Montcalm,' specially. I jest can't stand 'em no longer, an' 'The Father o' His Country.' I'm gittin' tired o' that, 'n' the smirk he's got on his face. I feel jest as though I'd like to throw a stun at him this minute. You may feel so on them pictures, but I'd like to chuck the bull kit 'n' boogie into the cow shed. An' them winder curtains, 'n' the continued, looking around, 'things so blue they make me shiver, an' this carpet with the figgers o' green and yaller birds, it sorter stuns me."

"Now Pattycake's comin' party soon. She must 'a' seen more cheerful keepin' rooms 'n' this 'n' I'm caltatin' we'd best rip this 'n' all up an' fix it new. Then thar's the front chamber—in fact, both on 'em with the yaller spindle beds 'n' blue curtains, an' only a square of rag carpet front o' the dressers. Say, Mandy," he continued, looking around once more, "how'd we ever happen to git so many blue curtains?"

His discontent with their home now took shape in vigorous action, and Aunt Mandy came to share it. Trip after trip to the Riggsville store was made. Two new chamber sets and rolls of carpeting arrived at the station six miles away, and came up the valley. A paperhanger was engaged and kept busy for ten days. The death-bed pictures were literally kicked into the cow shed, and in three weeks four rooms had been so reconstructed and fitted anew that no one would recognize them.

Meanwhile Uncle Jud had utterly neglected his "craps," while he worked around the house. The wide lawn had been clipped close. A new picket fence, painted white, replaced the leaning, zigzag one around the garden. Weeds and brush disappeared, and only Aunt Mandy's protest saved the picturesque brown house from a coat of paint.

And then "Pattycake" arrived. Nearly a year before she had been brought here, a weary, bedraggled, dusty, half-starved wail. Now Uncle Jud met her at the station, his face shining. Aunt Mandy clasped her close to her portly person; and as Chip looked around and saw what had been done in her honor and to make her welcome, her eyes filled.

"I never thought anybody would care for me like this," she exclaimed, and then glancing at Uncle Jud, her eyes alight, she threw her arms about his neck and, for the first time, kissed him.

And never in all his life had he felt more amply paid for anything he had done.

Then and there, Chip resolved to do something that now lay in her power—to face shame and humbled pride and all the sacrifice it meant to her in the end, and reunite these two long-separated brothers. But not now, no, not yet.

Before her lay two golden joyous summer months. Aunt Abby was coming up later. She could not face her own humiliation now. She must wait until these happy days were past, then tell her wretched story, not sparing herself one iota, and then, if she must,

CHAPTER XXVII.—Life at Peaceful Valley and the home of Judson Walker fell into its usual monotony after Chip's departure.

Each day Uncle Jud went about his chores and his crop-gathering and watched the leaves grow scarlet, then brown, and finally go eddying up and down the valley, or heap themselves into every nook and cranny for final sleep.

Existence had become something like this to him, but he could no longer anticipate a vernal budding forth as the leaves came, but only the sear and autumn for himself, with the small and sadly neglected churchyard at the Corners for his ending.

Snow came and piled itself into fantastic drifts. The stream's summer chatter was hushed. The cows, chickens, and his horse, with wood-cutting, became his sole care. Once a week he journeyed to the Corners for his weekly paper, and Mandy's errands, always hoping for a message from Chip. Now and then one came, a little missive in angular chirography, telling how she longed to return to them, which they read and reread by candlelight.

Somehow this strange wanderer, this unaccounted-for wail, had crept into his life and love as a flower would, and "Pattycake," as he had named her, with her appealing eyes and odd ways, was never out of his thoughts.

And so the winter dragged its slow, chill course. Spring finally unlocked the brook once more, the apple and cherry blossoms came, the robins began nest-building, and one day Uncle Jud returned from the corner with a glad smile on his face.

"Pattycake's school's goin' to close in a couple o' weeks more, 'n' then she's comin' home," he announced, and Aunt Mandy, her face beaming, made haste to wipe her "specs" and read the joyous tidings.